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Aeroplane Service Between



THEN AND NOW SYRIA



1870 Then and Now—Syria 1920

BY CHARLOTTE H. BROWN, SIDON, SYRIA.

FIFTY years ago, to a Syrian, "America" was the name of a country from which the missionaries came, the source of money for the work, the wonderful land that supplied beautiful Christmas boxes for the fortunate school children and stories of big floods and frightful accidents—a land about which the Americans liked to talk, but of which otherwise the Syrians knew little. Almost no one had left for that far-away land, and Syrians were still content to stay at home. If any one left for a distant country, it was a big event for the whole village, and the traveler bade farewell amid tears and wails.

How different now! Thousands have left their native land, and every city, village, and almost every tiny hamlet in the country, have contributed to the throngs that have gone abroad to better their condition. Hundreds have returned; a few to stay, some to build nice, red-tiled houses, and then return to make more money. Others of the young men get themselves brides from among the prettiest maidens of their villages before settling permanently in their adopted homes. In even the most out-of-the-way settlements will be found some man or woman who speaks broken English learned during a sojourn in New York. He will tell the names of twenty States he has been in, and there is hardly a large city in the country that he does not know something about. Many wonder how it is that the missionary can be at all contented to live and work in poor Syria, when we might be living in rich and wonderful America.

Many of the old ways and customs are gradually

disappearing, and the *Land* is not quite so much a commentary on the *Book* as it was fifty years ago. Many of the Moslems no longer wear the flowing robes of the Orient that made them look so stately and dignified. Almost all of our male teachers now wear the ordinary European dress, and one often sees an uncovered head in the house of God, whereas in the old days the feet might be uncovered, but the head almost never.

Work in Syria was undertaken long before 1870, but in the early days it was under the American (Congregational) Board. The Beirut and Sidon boarding schools for girls passed their fiftieth milestone some ten years ago. The existing boarding schools for boys in Sidon, Suk el Gharb and Tripoli were later in starting, but have attained a large growth. Almost all have started in a very modest way, enlarging their old buildings or adding on an entirely new plant, as in Tripoli and Beirut Girls' Schools, as the growth demanded. In Sidon of late years no adequate provision has been made, the school is far behind the times in any modern equipment, and is woefully inconvenient and unsanitary.

Several of the boarding schools were started by taking in a few needy Protestant girls for whom at that time there were no proper educational advantages outside the homes of the missionaries or in close touch with them. They were taken free of charge and helped in the house-work of the home or of the little school then started. Everything was simple and primitive in those days, from the smoothly combed hair and straight-bodied dresses of the girls, to the stiff wooden benches they sat on. In the earlier schools only a little tuition, or none at all, was charged, and not till 1887 were the boarders in Sidon Seminary for Girls requested to bring their own beds and bedding and pay any tui-

tion. On the contrary, this present year in the American School for Girls, Beirut, they have many more applicants than can be received who will gladly pay from twenty-five to thirty pounds for the privilege of getting in.

Even yet illiteracy is very common. In some places not a single woman knows how to read, but there are fewer such places than formerly. The villages where there are no schools of any sort are many, though the larger towns and all the cities have Catholic or Greek, Protestant and Moslem schools. It has always been easier to collect tuition money for the education of the boys than for that of the girls, and perhaps to a certain extent it will always be so. Now it is often only the mother of a family who cannot read, or even, in some cases, only the grandmother. It has been a long and hard fight to make the people realize that it is worth while to educate the girls, but the time has now come when all over Syria there is a plea for schools and *more* schools, and they look to the American Mission for aid in obtaining them.

During the war, when there arose a cry of "Turkey for the Turks," the government decreed that Turkish must be taught in the schools, and that religious instruction must be voluntary, no Moslem nor pupil of any other sect being required to attend Bible classes. Small attention was paid to our girls' school in Sidon, but in the boys' school, attended as it was by many Moslems, regular Bible classes had to be omitted by special order of the government. Both of the schools had previously been closed by the government, but the year following the day-school departments were opened with no special permission, a hint having been given that if the boys' school was opened no notice would be taken of it. After the "Occupation," which took place in October, 1918, the

same school resumed its regular Bible classes and instruction.

We have always had some Moslems in our schools, but of late years their number has increased, and there is a great demand for the instruction that our schools give. In the American School for Girls, Beirut, a large proportion of the girls are from Mohammedan families, and their school room was crowded last year to its utmost capacity. Many applicants, all willing to pay, were turned away. In other schools, such as the Sidon boys' school, the majority of the pupils were Moslems.

Since Dr. Harris' death in Tripoli, and Dr. Mary P. Eddy's withdrawal from active service on account of her health, there has been no medical missionary within our borders. Dr. Harris held almost daily clinics, and made tours among the villages. Dr. Mary Eddy, the first woman physician to receive a license from the Turkish Empire, at first held clinics in various districts, and later started the Ophthalmic Hospital in Maamaltain. Later still, when her eyesight began to grow dim, she turned her splendid energy and superior talents to opening the one place in Syria where tuberculosis patients are welcomed. There they are made well if they come under treatment soon enough, or they are allowed a peaceful place to die if, as is the case with many, they arrive in the advanced stages of that disease. I once asked a teacher why they were more afraid of consumption than of small-pox. She said it was because of the long continuance of the disease when the patient had to be waited on and was a great expense, with death the inevitable end, while with small-pox if death comes it comes quickly.

From the time the Mission was started to the time of General Allenby's great achievement, or "stunt" as the British Tommy calls it, the Turkish

Government opposed and hindered any new extension of the work, closing schools, refusing to allow new ones to be opened, hindering as long as possible the building of certain churches and exercising a foolish and irritating censorship of the American Press at Beirut and of all its publications except the Bible. The Bible, through a special providence of God, has the imperial sanction and can be printed and distributed without let or hindrance.

Syria has been a country bound hand and foot by an alien government inimical to all progress in the political and industrial world. Those bonds were broken to a great extent in the fall of 1918, when the Turks fled before the advancing armies of General Allenby. Men long hidden because they feared conscription by a government for which they had no loyalty, appeared once more on the streets, and in their shops, and many women, laboring in the streets to support their impoverished or starving children, returned to their homes as their husbands took up their usual avocations. Importations began to come into the country on the breaking up of the long-continued blockade. The inadequate relief afforded by the Americans* when shut off so largely from the outside world, was replaced by the larger help of the American Red Cross, and later by the American Committee of Relief in the Near East (A. C. R. N. E. or White Star), when it took over the relief for the destitute orphans and widows of Syria and Armenia.

On all sides hope has revived, faith in the future of the country has been strengthened, and every religious leader feels that now is the time to plan deeply and widely for the religious work of this long down-trodden land.

*See Editor's Postscript.

Editor's Postscript.

The author of this leaflet, who is Principal of Sidon Seminary, touches too lightly upon the relief which she and other missionaries provided during the years when they were cut off from the world. From other sources we cull the following:

The picture of Syria during these three years is a picture of suffering. The first of the three years the people wept, the second they died by the thousands, the third they lost all hope save that which the missionary inspired. Poverty was rampant. A large number of families in Syria live on money sent by relatives in America, and have no other means of support. No money was allowed into Syria, save what was obtained through the ingenuity and skill and marvelous efficiency of the Treasurer of the Presbyterian Mission at Beirut, who, when the banks ceased to function and the complicated system of international exchange broke down, stepped into the breach, and carried on successfully a large philanthropic banking business for the benefit of the people of Syria.

Disease enfeebled the population, and famine increased in strength each year. People sold their bedding, doors, windows, everything, for food.

In such a state of society the missionary toiled night and day. The Turkish Government at times forbade any organized relief work. Little groups conferred together and planned with consummate skill methods for relief. Personal visitation was made in many homes to avoid fraud. Women were discovered who had lured children to their home, killed them, eaten the flesh, boiled the fat, and sold it in the market place. A father stole the food given to his little child until the child died of starvation.

Hospital work was carried on wherever possible. Large soup kitchens which treated 1,200 or 1,500 daily

were opened at various places, so that thousands of lives were saved. Sidon Seminary and Gerard Institute gave their supplies, bed-spreads, clothing belonging to the orphanage, and individual gifts, sweaters, skirts, hats, coats, curtains, anything that would keep people from freezing. One of the dormitories of the Seminary was turned into a wool room. The wool was washed in the garden, placed on the flat roof to dry, stored in the dormitories and, finally wrought into clothing, it saved thousands from freezing to death.

The Mission Press, while continuing its publication work, was a banking establishment, a center for negotiations of considerable sums of money sent through the Board by friends in America, by the Armenian and Syrian Relief Committee, and the Red Cross.

The missionaries showed extraordinary faith. At one time they agreed to the expenditure of \$200,000 for relief work, relying upon the church at home to furnish the money. Such courage, such faith and such devotion surely must find an answer in those of us who remained in the home land.

November, 1919.

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